

A
SERMON

Preached on the
FAST-DAY,

Decemb. 22. 1680.

At St. Margarets Westminster,

Before the Honourable
House of COMMONS.

BY

GILBERT BURNET, D.D.

L O N D O N,

Printed by J. D. for Richard Chiswell, at the Rose and
Crown in St. Paul's Church-Yard. 1681.

1880

...

...

...

...

...

...

Rev. 3. 2, 3.

I have not found thy Works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a Thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

THere is nothing in which Men of all Religions do so constantly agree, as in the Duties we are now about : so that it may be justly called *The Voice and Law of Nature*, which directs all people, when in great Straits, or under great Fears, to call on that God whom they serve, to implore his Pity, and pray for his Assistance. I need not tell you how all *Heathen Nations* do it : the *Jews* practise it : *Christians* of every Perswasion have upon all great Occasions, and in all Ages, set about it solemnly. Some, with the Pageantry of *Heathenish* Processions ; and others, with the simplicity that becomes their Profession, as We do this day.

When the Ship in which *Jonas* endeavoured to have fled from the Discharge of an uneasy Commission which God had given him, was driven in a Storm, and brought to great Extremities, *every Man called upon his God* : only the guilty Person, whose God could only hear and help them, *lay fast asleep*. I need not enlarge
 B on

Jona 1. 5.

on the too visible Occasions of our Calling on God at this time : a sadness that is spread over the Faces, and fills the Hearts of all Men ; the present Distractions We are under, and the greater Mischiefs of which We are afraid, speak aloud, and need not be further described : so that all good Men had in their secret Mournings, and in their Wishes for a Publick Humiliation of the whole Nation, anticipated the Address of this *Honourable Assembly*. It is well that We pay this visible Homage to Religion and its blessed Author. In this Storm We have but one God to fly to, and one Lord and Mediator, by whom We may Address to him : If the guilty Persons will sleep on still, or do worse, continue Sinning while we are Fasting and Mourning ; yet if We *Cry mightily to God*, We may reasonably hope that He will ease Us of that load of our Sins, which only can, and certainly will sink Us, if it still hang on Us. When We consider Our present ill Condition, and alas ! perhaps this is but the beginning of Our Sorrows ; and reflect on the Signal Blessings We have received from God, and that We still retain that holy Religion which was revealed from Heaven by Jesus Christ, *The great High Priest of our Profession*, We cannot be long to seek for the true Causes of all those Evils which We either feel or fear. Truth is still the same, and of the same Value with the Author of it ; and the God of Truth changes not. What has then separated between God and Us ? and what hath raised that thick Cloud that seems to be set over Us, and is ready to discharge it self in *Fire Brimstone, and a horrible Tempest* ? *God's Hand is not shortned, that it cannot save, neither is his Ear heavy that it cannot hear : But it is our Iniquities have*

have separated between us and our God, and our Sins have hid His Face from Us, if He will not hear. Therefore those whom you command to plead with You, in the Name of God, on such Occasions, ought to Cry aloud, and not spare, but with all the plainness that becomes this Place, and this Time, Shew you your Transgressions and your Sins. Isa. 58. 1.

In order to this, I have made choice of these words, being a part of a short, but weighty *Epistle*, written by St. John, in the Name of Christ, to the Church of *Sardis*. Of it in particular, we have so little recorded in the History of the Church, that We can gather nothing from thence to give us a clearer Light into the meaning of these words: so I shall go no further than the *Epistle* it self, for setting before You the State in which it was at that time. *Sardis* had a great Name among the other Churches, as being one of those planted by the Apostles: *It had a Name that it lived, yet was dead:* Verf. 2. the Power and Life of Religion was under a great decay, the Remainers of it in some few Persons, that *had not defiled their Garments,* were even ready to die: Verf. 4. they were all that were left of those who had at first sincerely embraced the *Christian Religion*; they were but a Remnant of what had been, and they were like to drop off soon: but for the rest, tho they retained the outward Profession of their Religion, yet Christ *knew their Works*: and though in some things they might be praiseworthy, yet they were not full Weight and Measure; they were not such as became their Circumstances, their Light, the Advantages they had, nor the Age they lived in, in vvhich they ought not only to have been blameless and harmless, but to have lookt like the *Sons of God,* and

Phil. 2.15. *to shine as Lights in the World, holding forth the Word of Life.* In a word, *their Works were not perfect before God.*

Upon this, direction is given them, how to amend what was defective or amiss among them: they were to *Remember what they had received and heard*, from the Apostles: They were to make that the Standard of their Actions: they were neither to frame a Religion to themselves, out of their own Imaginations, or make up a mixture of *Heathenism* and *Christianity*, to which many were then inclined; nor were they to be seduced by any false Teachers from the Apostolical Doctrine, which was their Rule; to this they were to adhere, and to *hold it fast*. They were to maintain it in its Purity uncorrupted while they lived, and to deliver it so to their Posterity at their Death.

They are also directed in the use of it, not to preserve it only as a matter of Speculation, or as a Denomination by which they were discriminated from others, but were to improve it so as to be the better for it; *To Repent*, to change their Hearts and Lives. If they were not awakened by this Alarm given them from Heaven, they were to look for a more terrible Blow, which should surprize them in the midst of their Securities, as a Thief when he is least lookt for: which also intimates the Severity, as well as the suddenness of the Stroke. Thieves that break in in the Night, commonly carry all away with them that is worth their pains. On the other hand, the Remnant, who were then *but a few, that kept their Garments clean*, are comforted with the hopes of enjoying God in a State of more perfect Holiness, expressed in the Figure of *walking with Christ in White*..

White : and to encourage others to follow their steps, a general Promise is made to all them that continued to the end in that course of Life, that they should be advanced to the same State of perfect Holiness : their Names were now to be written in the *Book of Life* ; and at the Great Day, when these Books shall be opened, Christ would, before God, Angels, and Saints, give such a Testimony to them as is recorded in the 25th Chap. of St. Mat. Gospel, *When I was Hungry, ye Fed me, &c.* This *Epistle* being thus explained, it will not be difficult to apprehend what the Particulars are on which I shall enlarge : They are these five :

1. Jesus Christ observes, and will reckon with every Church, according to the Blessings which they have received, if they live not suitably to them.

2. The Rule by which we are to examine our selves, and by which God will judge us, is the Doctrine which the Churches received from the Apostles.

3. All those who have heard and received this Doctrine, ought to keep it carefully, and to convey down that Sacred Trust committed to them to the succeeding Generations.

4. The chief Use We ought to make of this Doctrine, is to reform our Hearts and Lives ; to repent, and to forsake our Sins.

5. Such as will not make this Use of it, have reason to look for sudden and severe Judgments. All these things are clearly gathered out of my Text, and seem to comprehend the full sense of these words, *I have not found thy Works perfect before God : Remember therefore how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a Thief,*

Thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

To Return to the first.

τέλειος
πράξεις
μὲν &c.

I. Jesus Christ observes, and will reckon with every Church, according to the Blessings which they have received, if they live not suitably to them. *I have not found thy Works perfect before God.* *Perfect*: the Greek word is different from that which is commonly rendred *Perfect*, and strictly imports, *accomplished* or *filled up* with such Ingredients as make Works acceptable with God. By this we are not to understand that absolute Perfection, which excludes all Sin, or all Defects; for Works so perfect belong to another State: but such a Perfection as agrees to the Gospel-Covenant, by which all that is sincere is *perfect* in some sort, and will be so accounted for to us by God. Wherein the Works of this Church were not perfect, we can only guess at it, by what we find in the other *Epistles* in this and the former Chapter, and in the *Epistles* written by S. Paul to some other Churches. There are three things chiefly specified and insisted on.

Mat. 13.
20, 21.
Gal. 5.7.

1. Their falling from their *first Love*, and not doing their *first Works*, charged by St. John on the Church of *Ephesus*, and by St. Paul on the *Galathians*: they received the Gospel, according to the Parable of the Seed, with great joy: they began in the Spirit, they did run well, but the fear of Persecution, or the Cares of the World, and the Deceitfulness of Riches, made that the Seed of the Word of God, that had been sown among them, either withered, or was choaked; their first

first Fervour abated, their Love cooled, they became Lukewarm, and then quite cold and dead ; so that those who began *in the Spirit* in a spiritual Course, or had received the Gifts or Graces of the Holy Spirit, ended *in the Flesh*, became carnal and loose men. Gal. 3.3.

2. They are charged for listning to false Teachers and Seducers: they had heard many strange things from the Apostles which were new to them, and these did raise a curiosity in them after Novelties, with a disposition to receive them ; some of them are particularly named in these *Epistles* : some brought in *Heathenish* Sorceries and Idolatrous Rites among them, as *Balaam* and *Jesabel* had done : others loosed all the Tyes of modesty and Wedlock, as the *Nicolaitans* did : others were for subjecting the *Christian Church* to the Yoke of all the Ceremonies of the *Mosaical Law* : and by the Arts which these Seducers used, the Churches that had received the Apostles with great kindness, so that they were ready to have plucked out their very Eyes for them, a phrase expressing the tenderest Affection, yet were too much inclined to entertain those false Apostles. Gal. 4. 15.

3. They were apt to divide and quarrel unreasonably about little and inconsiderable things, and carried these Heats so far, that even when they assembled together to receive the Holy Sacrament, they met *for the worse*, and *not for the better* : so that there were Divisions among them, and the several Parties assumed such Names as they thought would give them the most Credit : some were for *Paul*, some for *Apollo*, some for *Cephas*, and some for *Christ*. And the very Teachers themselves were factions and contentious, so that some at *Rome*, when *S. Paul* was in Prison for the Gospel, preached there *out of Contention*, that they I Cor. 11. 17, 18. I Cor. 1. 12. Phil. 1 15, 16.

they might thereby *add affliction to his Bonds* : though in that they were disappointed ; for notwithstanding their Injustice to him, he rejoyced that Christ was preached by them. Some one or all these had perhaps got into the Church of *Sardis*, for which *S. John*, in the name of Christ, Expostulates with them. They had much to answer for, to whom the Apostles had delivered what they had seen and heard concerning Jesus Christ, confirming it with many Miracles, and had conferred on them extraordinary Gifts, so that they were made *partakers of the Holy Ghost, and of the Powers of the World to come* : These seem to have been the sins of this as well as of the other *Apostolical Churches*.

And now to apply all this to Our own Case, suffer me first in the Name of God to plead with you, and to set before you the many blessings you have received from him, beyond most or rather any Nation now in the World : We are born in a Country that abounds not only with all that is necessary for the Inhabitants, but yields Us great store of very valuable Goods which We exchange with other Nations, and bring over such things as grow not among Us ; with a vast encrease of wealth, which from all parts of the World flows unto Us : Our Country being equally well situated for security and Traffique, We have almost forgot when We were visited with the Plague of Famine. We are under a Government so rarely tempered by Law, that in it We have all the Advantages of other Constitutions, and avoid the mischiefs of the several Forms of Government, as much as is possible for any thing that is managed by mortal and sinful men to be : So that after any of the Convulsions that have been among Us, it has been still found necessary to return to the old Channel, and observe

serve the Landmarks which Our Forefathers set Us. These Blessings We enjoy beyond any Nation in the World, but these We have in common with the former Ages; they are also Temporal and end with this Life, We have yet much more to answer for.

We have the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ among Us, and therein the Way to Life and Immortality hereafter, is opened to Us. This We have freed from all the impure mixtures of Idolatry or Superstition with which it is defiled in other Churches, and are delivered from the Tyranny of a Foreign Power. We have had Our Religion long secured to Us by Law, with all the Encouragements that can be expected, in a Church so happily constituted between the extreams of Ecclesiastical Tyranny on the one hand, and Enthusiastical Principles on the other hand; so that it is only our own Fault if We are not the Sanctuary and Defence of all other Reformed Churches, as well as We are the chief Object of the Practices and Designs of Our Enemies at *Rome*. This We have likewise in common with the former Age: but I shall next enumerate those Blessings that We of this Age have been more particularly favoured with: They are great and signal, and so obvious, that it will be enough to name them.

We were involved in a long and tragical War at Home, but were not swallowed up in it. Our Neighbour Island drank indeed of a bitterer Cup, and was covered almost all over with the Blood and the Carcases of the slain. But here the storm was not so terrible: The Conquerors were so restrained by that Supreme Power that governs the World, that it is no small wonder there was so little Mischief done, by those who had

C

the

the Power to do so much: When Our Confusions thickned so upon Us, that our Government changed almost as oft as the Weather; all things returned of a sudden to their old Chancel, the King was restored, and the Nation was settled in so serene and calm a manner, that it cannot be denied there was a signal hand of Heaven in it. The more have We all to answer for, that have made so ill use of so extraordinary a Blessing; since that time we have had plenty and peace at home these twenty years, no breaking out, no complaining in Our Streets or Countries. We have all this while lived under the clear Light of the Gospel. And though many of the Pastors have much to answer, for their great failings; yet there have been raised up among us not a few eminent and faithful Labourers, who have asserted the Truth, and demonstrated the power of Religion, with as much advantage as hath been done in any Age since Miracles and Persecution ceased: and these have frequently given publick and free warning to the Nation. Many excellent Books have been writ, and Sermons have been published as well as preached, which will remain to the next Age to testify against that we live in. God has been calling on Us aloud from Heaven, both by his Mercies and Judgments, to turn to him, and to bring forth fruits worthy of Repentance, and meet for the Kingdom of God; that is, for his holy Gospel. A raging Pestilence, and a consuming Fire came quick one after another to awaken Us effectually: yet though We were then engaged in an expenceful War, God did not deliver Us up into the hands of our Enemies, though he corrected Us so severely himself.

These

These things did perhaps give a little stop to some persons, though others went on still publishing their Sin as *Sodom*; but with the return of Peace and the continuance of Plenty, We returned to, or still continued in our Sins: We have been delivered from another War since, and the ill designs of wicked Men were defeated and came to nothing: and now for above seven years We have slept in a profound Peace, and as profound a Security, when there was nothing but Vastation and Misery in the Countries that lie next to us: But our Enemies slept not, they were contriving how to make Us return back again into *Egypt*, or submit not our Necks only, but our Souls and Consciences to that Tyrannical yoke of the *Roman* Slavery; and thought the Design so well laid for *rooting out* that which they call a *Pestilent Heresie*, that it was upon the point of being executed. Then did it appear that God was still watching over Us for good: and he that saw all these secret contrivances, so closely carried and cemented with so many sacred ties, disappointed all their Councils, and brought all their Designs to Light, when We were least aware of it; being, though sensible of a great Danger hovering over Us, yet little apprehensive that it was so near Us, and was to break out in such a manner. I need not run over all those steps, by which Divine Providence has brought out what they intended we should never have known, till We had felt it, and been past the possibility of preventing or redressing it: They are well enough known, and are often in all our Mouths, Oh that they were as much in our Hearts!

And now put all these things together, and see if it may not be said concerning Us, what the Prophet *Isaias* said of the people of the Jews, *God has planted a Vinyard in a very fruitful place, with the choicest Vine, and has fenced it, and built a Tower in it*: In a word what more could have been done in this Vinyard, that has not been done in it? And therefore, as partial as we are apt to be in our own concerns, it may be referred to our selves, to judge between God and Us. We see and acknowledge what he has done for us; let us next consider what Grapes we have brought forth; what returns We have made to God? Have Our works been perfect before God? Alas! why do I say perfect! Have they not been on the contrary the worst, the most impious, and immoral that many could think on? We have exceeded the Sins of the Jews, and the Vices of the Heathens. It has not been only a slackning or going back of the Power of Religion, but an open revolt against Heaven; in too great a part of the Nation a Banner has been set up for Atheism and Impiety, and all have been encouraged to come about it. The Sins which our Popish Forefathers, and our more remote Heathenish Ancestors were so much ashamed of, that they committed them in corners, We have seen done in the sight of the Sun. The belief of a God, that sees, rewards and punishes, the rules of Vertue, and the doctrine of Christ have been by some openly assaulted, and treated with indignities which no other Nation could endure; while others have, if not directly consented to them, yet looked on as unconcerned, have laughed at and been pleased with them. Advantages have been taken from the Hypocrisie or Enthusiasm of the last Age, to throw off the very appearances
of

of Religion or Vertue in this Age: and it has passed for a piece of Gallantry and decent Breeding to be above the fears and apprehensions of a Supream Power, or a Future State. Have we forgot how publicly that great Blessing of the King's Restauration was abused? It grew to that height that it was thought a Scandal not to concur in all the excesses of Riot and Intemperance that did then defile the Land. Whither shall we now turn our Eyes? If on this place, Luxury, Immorality, and open Lewdness meet us almost in every corner: If on the Country, how does Intemperance, Injustice, and a total neglect, if not a resolved scorn of Religion fill most places? And the excesses of Drinking have in many parts of the Nation, not only corrupted Civil Conversation, but vitiated the very Vitals of our Government, by the ascendent that such practices have had in so essential and main a part of our Security, as are the Elections of this great and Honourable Assembly: of whom, if some generously scorned such methods, too many have complied too much with so base and so ignominious a custom. If we have thus abused the earthly Blessings of Peace and Plenty, and have much to answer for on that account: Oh what can we say to excuse our selves who have not only brought no Fruit to perfection, notwithstanding all that Seed of the Gospel that has been so plentifully sown among us, but have done what we could to defie God himself, and to drive him out of our Country, being weary of that very dead Form of Religion yet remaining. And to bring this home to our present Circumstances, though we are under great apprehensions of losing this blessed Light; what are we doing to engage God to be on our side?

We

We have been now for above two years in great Disorders, full of Alarms, and under eminent and visible Dangers; but what Lust or ill Custom have we parted with? What demonstration have we given to God or the World, that we consider Religion, as it is indeed the Power of God to the Salvation of our Souls? Or what do we for our holy Faith, that Infidels, Mahometans, Jews, or Papists, would not do for their Perswasions? Do we continue still in our Lewdness, Intemperance, Oppression, Injustice, Falshood and ill Nature, while we are talking of preserving our Religion, and yet are doing all we can to undermine or overthrow it?

If God is against us, all that we can do for preserving Religion, or our other just Rights, will either by his wise and holy Counsels be quite blasted; or perhaps the very methods that to us seem the most probable to secure them, may in conclusion really introduce that which we fear so much. Are our Works perfect before God who knows them? To make a Work perfect, it must be good in it self, flow from a good principle, and be directed to a good end. The greatest part of our Works are faulty in all these particulars, so that neither We nor our Works can be accepted with that God, that *is of purer Eyes than that he can behold Iniquity*. Some of our Works may be in themselves good, and such is a Zeal for the Reformed Religion; but if some do not believe that about which they make so much noise, or if others have no design but to serve base Ends or private Interests, which they hid with the pretence of Religion, and are ready to throw it off, when they have attained that for which they are
in

in truth only concerned, shall not God search this out ? Things may be so dressed up, as to have a fair appearance, but to God they appear as indeed they are : So the true value of us and our works, is according to what we are in his sight, from whom nothing can disguise us. From all these things it is but too evident, that our Works are not perfect before God.

If we will consider more particularly what may be supposed to have been the ground of the Expostulation in my Text, with this Apostolick Church of *Sardis*, we shall find the parallel betwixt it and us agrees but too well. These Churches had fallen from their first Love, and their first Works : Oh what sad decays are we come under ! And how much have we declined from that Zeal and Love which our Fathers bore to the Reformation ! There were two things that were visible in the practice of those who first embraced it among us : the one was the great pleasure they took in reading the Scriptures, from whence they were in derision called *Gospellers*. When the Bibles were first set up in Churches, and went at such rates that ordinary people could not buy them, what a running was there to Churches, and what Crouds gathered all day long about such as could read, to hear this blessed Word, which is now in all our Hands, and yet is scarce ever considered by us ? Some reade it only to abuse it, and make themselves merry with some Atheistical Jestes to which they wrest it : Others judge that indecent, so because they will make no ill use of it, they make none at all, and never open it but for fashion : some imploy their time in searching into the abstruser parts of it, with

with a prying and vain curiosity : some read it meerly to acquire a faculty of talking in such a Stile, and so either they pervert the Scripture by their false Glosses, or only learn to defend some Opinions out of it, or to discourse in that Dialect, for private Designs, to which that is perhaps some way necessary. But who read them with a simplicity of Mind to be directed by them, and to be inwardly inflamed by the heavenly strains in them? So that we have little left among us to entitle us to the Name of Gospellers.

The other chief Character by which the *Reformed* were at first known, was their applying themselves only to God through Jesus Christ. This was intended to take men off from two fatal Errors, in which they had been formerly led ; the one was relying on such external Works as were really of no Value at all, and were only the jugglings of those deceitful Guides, that had set up Pilgrimages, slight Penances, and the purchasing Indulgences, in the room of that which our Saviour had revealed to the World ; the other was their imagining that they were justified by the Sacraments, upon some slight acts of sorrow or devotion. In stead of these things the Reformers set up the applying to God through Jesus Christ according to the methods of the Gospel : so that great and frequent addresses to the Father through his Son was the Mark by which they were then known : This begetting in them a sense of that Love which their Saviour had for them, could not but kindle returns of Love suitable to it ; and that must needs reform the inward Man, upon which Purity and Holiness of Life will certainly follow.

This

This was the main Article of the Reformation, and being that upon which the Hopes of Salvation depended, vvas indeed the thing of the greatest Consequence ; though it vvas afterwards managed with too much Metaphysical Nicety. In sum, this being the chief Character of a true Protestant, vve may soon see how much vve have fallen from that Love vvhich our Fathers had to this Truth, while they lived ; and that appeared more signally by their dying for it, vvhen they vv ere called to give their last Testimony to it. But what is all this to us ? Are vve living under the Influences of that Love ? Do our Hearts burn with the sense of it ? What Reverence have vve for the Person, or vvhat Obedience pay vve to the Doctrine of our Crucified Saviour ? If any of this remain, it is much spent, at least, and ready to die.

The second Thing charged on these Churches, vvas, their being apt to be carried away by the cunning flight of those vvho lay in vvait to deceive, and their being too easily disposed to vitiate Christianity vvith the mixtures of Judaism, or Hethenism, or other Errors. Our Vices have taken us off from the Practice of the plain and indispensable Duties of our Holy Religion ; and then it is no vvonder vve find no pleasure in that Doctrine vv which can give no true Comfort to such as continue in their Sins. This disposes People to seek that elsewhere, vv which they cannot have among us : and therefore a Religion made up of Pomp and Shew, vv wherein God and his Saints vv ere offered to be bribed, in vv which they knew the Rates of Sin, and the Price of Heaven, found us but too well prepared to become Proselites to it. Our Sins have been also so visible and scandalous, that they have made our Communion grow
D loath-

loathsome to many well-disposed, but weak minds, and have tempted them to separate from our Assemblies, when they saw such mixed multitudes among us : so that they have run into Sects, that had the appearance of greater gravity and strictness.

3. And we are no less faulty in the third Particular, of contending out of measure, for things that are no way essential to Salvation. Things of so indifferent a nature, that succeeding Ages will wonder how Men could manage such long and eager Contests about them. We have fallen into Passions concerning them, these have grown up to a hatred, which hath broken out into most violent and dismal Effects, and seems now settled into a formed Rent and Separation. Where is that charitable, healing and compassionate Temper which becomes Christians, and reformed Christians ? especially when they are as it were struggling for Life. O, shall nothing make us wiser ? shall neither the Advantages our Enemies take, nor the Prejudices Religion suffers by our Contests, dispose us to bear with one anothers Infirmities, and to manage our Differences, if we cannot entirely bury them, with a more Christian and decent Temper ! There have been Extrems on all hands : neither side can free themselves from being too much exasperated : The resentment for what has been done in the several turns of Affairs, has gone too far with us. It is not so much our Differences that divide us one from another, as our Alienation one from another which widens our Differences, and makes them appear to be greater than indeed they are. So on all Accounts we must acknowledg, that when our Works are weighed in those just Ballances, they cannot be found perfect before God. I hope we are all in some measure convinced

vinced of this: The thing is alas too visible. What is then to be done, but to set about a real Reformation, vvith all possible seriousness and sincerity? And in order to this, and to direct us in it, here is a Rule and Standard given, by which we may govern our selves in the Means or Methods to it; and that is the second thing I proposed to speak to.

2. The Rule by which we are to examine our selves, and by vvhich God vvill judg us, is the Doctrine which the Churches received from the Apostles, *Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard.* Here is a certain fixed Rule; vve are neither left to the Heats of our own Fancies, nor to the Uncertainties of Tradition, nor to the Impostures of such as may pretend to the government of our Consciences: but are conducted by a more certain Thread. It is true, in the Apostles days this Doctrine was at first preached and received, before it was written. There was no great danger as long as they lived, who might be appealed to in any Difficulty which could arise concerning their Doctrine: so it is a vain way of arguing, to infer from the mention of *Tradition* in the Epistles, that we, after so many Ages are past, and so many Impostures have been discovered, should be obliged to receive what may be obtruded on us as Apostolical Tradition. Tradition while the Apostles lived, was what the Scripture is now: And indeed, so uncertain a conveyance is Oral Tradition, that in the very Apostles days, or soon after, when there were no Advantages to be made by such Cheats, and so there was less to tempt Men to them, yet many false Gospels were given out, and false Doctrines were infused into some weaker People. We know how unfaithful a Conveyer Tradition was of Natural Religion among the

Gentile Nations : The Gospel tells us how the Jews doted on the Traditions of their Fathers, and by them *made the Commandments of God of none effect*. The uncertainty of Tradition where it was not put in Writing, appeared within an Age after the Apostles, in the Contests concerning the Observation of *Easter* : both sides vouching the Practice of the Apostles, and that even while some were alive, that had seen them, and had lived with them. But after that Wealth and Greatness had corrupted the Church, and this Holy Religion was made an Engine to advance the Ambition and Interests of designing Men, then what a swarm of supposititious Writings appeared every where to support some Opinions or Designs ; many of these were discovered and branded, but others passed without a Censure ; so that it was long before Criticks in this and the former Age, could find out what was genuine, and what was counterfeit.

The most advantageous Imposture was coined and received in the 9th Century ; a whole Volume of the Epistles of the first Bishops of *Rome* from the Apostles days downwards, was pretended to be found ; in which they were represented as governing the Church in the former Ages, with the same *fulness of Power*, that their Successors have pretended to since. This was rejected by some in that Age, but kindly entertained by those that were more concerned for their own Greatness than for Truth : and by the Presidents in these Epistles, they justified what they did, till their Tyranny came to be generally submitted to : And now when these Epistles are found to be spurious, they have been forced to throw them away ; but stand upon Possession and Prescription, though it began at first upon this and some other Impostures,

postures, not unlike it, such as the Donation of *Constantine*, and many more.

They well know that their Cause cannot be defended if the Scriptures are appealed to : these in many Points are directly against them, as in the Worship of Images, and Angels ; the Praying in an unknown Tongue ; and the denying the Chalice, or saying, that Christ's Body which is now in Heaven, is in the Sacrament : in other things they are silent, such as the Pope's Power, the Infallibility of a General Council, the praying to Saints, the redeeming Souls out of Purgatory, Indulgences, Pilgrimages, with a thousand other additions, by which they have vitiated the Purity of that Holy Doctrine, vvhich the Apostles delivered to the World. This is the Foundation of our vvhole Religion, that we believe all that the Apostles delivered to the Churches, and no more : So we stand to this Appeal in my Text, *Remember therefore that thou hast received and heard.* It vv ere easie to instance it in many Particulars, and to shew you how at first Ignorance and Superstition let in some Customs ; and perhaps those vvho introduced them at first, being innocent, but weak Men, meant vvell in it : So to draw the Heathens off from their Idolatry, they directed them to call on Saints, instead of the Gods they had formerly vvorshipped : and to perswade People to receive the Sacrament with great devotion, they strained their Eloquence and Invention to recommend the value of it in high Figures. Many more might be named, but these may suffice : Afterwards, when the *Roman* Empire was over-run by the Incursions of the Barbarous Nations, and Civility, Religion, and Learning vv ere almost driven out of the World ; then some crafty and aspiring Priests came to graft upon the
Customs

Customs of the former Times, new Opinions, and still to add new Rites, till in the end they swelled up to what they are now at in the *Roman Church*. When these Opinions were first broached, Visions and Dreams were given out to support them: and if these lesser Frauds did not prevail, pretended Miracles were not wanting to give them credit, till they were received; and being once received, they were enrolled among the Traditions of the Church, and so were no more to be contested or denied: if any presumed to do it, it was at his Peril. These Miracles were coined so, as to fit not only the Doctrine it self, but the way of explaining it; and as new ways of explaining vvere fallen upon, new Miracles suitable to these new Expositions were at hand.

When the Doctrine of the Corporal Presence vvas first received in the 9th Century, it was believed that the whole Loaf was an entire Body of Christ, so that he was sliced in pieces, and eat up in Gobbets; and so they continued to understand it near 300 Years. Then the Miracles to prove it were adjusted to that Conceit; it was given out, that it did sometimes bleed, and pieces of it vvere said to be converted to pieces of Flesh: but after that the School-Divinity came to be in request, this vway vvas not found so defensible, nor so decent: and then it was said, Christ was in every Crumb of the Host; so that upon the breaking it, an entire Christ flew off from the rest, which yet remained still as entire as it was, notwithstanding that Diminution: and then as they blessed Wafers instead of a Loaf, so the former Miracles were not so much talked of, though some ignorant Priests, that did not consider that these vvere contrary to the Doctrine of their Church, did in some places

places continue to act the former Cheats ; but new ones were more generally invented, and Christ was said to appear all in Rays, over or upon the Host : so well practised were they in the Arts of Jugling, as to make their Tricks always agree with their Hypothesis.

In opposition to all these false Doctrines, and lying Wonders, the Reformed have from the first beginning of the Reformation, set up the whole strength of their Cause, upon this single Plea, of receiving nothing as a part of their Faith, but what could be found in the Writings of the Apostles ; that so all agreeing on a common Umpire, their Differences might be more easily composed. The Church of *Rome* knows well what the Issue must be, if this is granted, and so have put the strength of their whole Cause upon the Authority of the Church, that is, themselves ; and the certainty of Oral Tradition, handed down by such Men as themselves are : Whether the one or the other seems to be the more ingenuous Principle, the more certain method of Trial, and the less liable to Deceit, I leave it to the Consciences of all wise and good Men.

But as we ought to *remember what we have thus received and heard*, so the end of this is not barely for speculation, to inform us about some Notions, or to furnish us with Arguments and Discourse ; these things are only necessary for a further end ; that our Minds being well informed, and our belief rightly directed, we may govern our Lives according to what the Holy Apostles have left to us. It is, because *their Works were not perfect*, that they are here charged *therefore to remember the Doctrine that they had received* : What shall our Knowledg, our Orthodoxie, and soundness of Opinion avail us, if we do not reduce it to practice ? unless it be to heighten
our

our Condemnation, and to intitle us to more Stripes, and severer Judgments. Here we will find our Duties set before us, and from thence we will both know what our Sins have been, and how to turn from them. O that there were such a Heart in us! But as we ought to remember and improve the Doctrine delivered to the Church by the Apostles, so we ought to keep it carefully.

3. And this is the third Particular I am to speak to : All who have received this Doctrine, ought to preserve it, and to convey down that Sacred Trust committed to them, to the succeeding Generations. This is to *Hold fast* what we have received and heard. The meaning of this, considering the Circumstances the Church of *Sardis* was in, is either that they should preserve it pure, and keep it as it was delivered to them; or that if Persecutions should arise for the Faith, they should not depart from it for the Love of this present World, or make shipwreck of it; but should *hold fast the Profession of their Faith without wavering*. There were many Tares sown then in the Field of the Church; many of the Followers of *Simon Magus* were corrupting the Christian Religion; it was necessary on that account to look carefully to that Sacred *Depositum* that was put in their Hands. There was also a black Cloud gathering, a Persecution was coming on the Church: One Storm had passed, that had been raised by *Nero*, and they were now in another set on by *Domitian*; therefore it was necessary to put them on their Guard, and to charge them to keep, or *Hold fast* the Doctrine delivered to them. This was all that they could be obliged to. But in our Circumstances there is somewhat else imported in this Holding fast, that

that we ought not only to keep our Religion pure, and to be ready to suffer for it, if we are called to it; but since we enjoy the Protection and Security of Law, and lawful Authority, we ought to hold that fast, and deliver it down to our Posterity, as we have received it from our Fathers.

We are to keep it pure from the Corruptions that may be introduced to vitiate the simplicity of our Holy Religion. We know the Enemies of the Church sleep not, though the Watchmen sleep too often. While we have Adversaries that are so restless and industrious, that make up in their Arts of Insinuation, and indefatigable Diligence, what is wanting in the Justice and Goodness of their Cause; on these our Eyes ought to be much set. They have corrupted Religion wherever their Arts have been successful; and have endeavoured to overthrow all Governments, and broken the Peace of all Societies, that have been so much on their Guard as to look carefully to them. For that same Principle that makes them burn and destroy where they have Power, makes them also incessantly plot and practise where they have it not. Severities in Matters of Religion are indeed contrary to that humanity that is imprinted in our Nature, and to those Rules that are often repeated in Scripture. But if any Sect of Religion continues to breed frequent and almost uninterrupted Disturbances in any Government, it is not enough to punish those that are found in the Fault; but if it is evident, as it is certainly in this Case, that their Doctrine sets them on to, and will bear them through in such Conspiracies, it seems not possible to secure the Peace of a Kingdom so much infested by them, as we have been now 120 Years, but by delivering it entirely out of their hands, and putting an utter

E end

end to the Distractions we have been in, and the Mischiefs we have smarted under, by their means. They will live much better among their own Friends, beyond-Sea, where they may freely exercise their own Religion; and I am sure we will be much the happier and quieter for being freed from the trouble they have given us. And thus we are to *Hold fast* the Apostles Doctrine, and to keep our selves from the Infection of those who have corrupted it.

But if this cannot be done, and if God either to punish us for our former Sins, or to raise again the true Spirit of the Reformed Religion, to purifie us from our Dross, and to melt us into one Lump, and close up those Breaches which we have been rather widening than healing, will deliver us up into the hands of our merciless and implacable Enemies; then, as we know what we are to look for, so we ought to prepare our selves for it, and resolve to be *faithful to the Death*. We know what will be, not only by what has been, but by what is the Doctrine of that Church, of extirpating Hereticks, decreed in their General Councils: and what they have met with of late among us, has so whetted their Spirits against us, that if ever we are in their Power, the Cruelty of their Religion, being quickned by their private Resentments, we can look for nothing, but either to be forced to worship a piece of Bread, and to renounce that Faith which we now profess, or to seal it with our Blood, and that perhaps in the cruellest manner. I know it is not easie for Flesh and Blood so much as to think on these things without horror; But Oh, what will it be to suffer them! It will not be our living peaceably, nor our keeping our Belief to our selves, that will secure us: we must in all things comply; nay, and if we should dissemble and comply, we must by an over-acting Zeal

Zeal procure our Pardon for what is past, and beget a Confidence in them for the future. I shall on this Head represent a little of what you may expect, by mentioning some few Passages of *Queen Maries*, never to be forgotten, bloody Reign, that are not so generally known. At first She promised the continuance of the Established Religion; soon after She procured it to be generally changed, even while the Laws were yet in force for it: But then it was said, none should be forced in their Consciences, if they would live peaceably. But when the Change was fully brought about, then, according to the Natural Genius of that Religion, an open and undistinguish't Persecution was resolved on. Orders were then sent from the Council Table, to the Justices of Peace, to have Spies in every Parish to observe every Man's Deportment: a bare Suspicion vvas ground enough to proceed upon. Persons being presented upon Suspicion, were imprisoned: and, without any Proofs or Witnesses brought against them, Articles vvere offered to them; to vvhich if they did not in all things answer according to the Doctrine of that Church, and if they could not be induced to change their Perswasions, they vvere condemned to the Fire, though they had neither said nor acted any thing contrary to the Established Religion. And it went yet further: The Justices of Peace having been often writ to, grew more and more backward to these Cruelties, especially vvhhen they saw them burn poor People single at first, then by pairs, then six, eight, ten, and thirteen were burnt in one Fire: neither the Blind nor Lame, aged Men, nor Women near their Time, no nor new-born Infants, escaping the rage of these Butchers: Then to make way for the Courts of Inquisition, a Commission vvas

given to a selected Number, of vvhom three was a Quorum, to make enquiry over all *England*, not only of such as were suspect of Heresy; but of all that did not expresse their Zeal for the Popish Religion, in taking Holy Bread, or Holy Water, or going in Processions; which tho they are not things to which all in that Communion are obliged; yet these discovering the Affections and Inclinations of the People, such as did them not, vvhere to be proceeded against upon these Suspicions. At first such as vvhere burnt, had their Lives offered to them at the Stake if they would Recant; but as the Persecution went on, they became more barbarous, so that it vvvas not enough for one to Recant then: for a Sheriff was cast in Prison and fined, for staying the Execution of one who did it: It was said, if he Recanted sincerely, it was better to burn him, than to leave him to the Temptations of becoming a Relapse; and if he did it not sincerely, it was pity to spare him. So which way soever it was, Die and Burn he must. And that none might escape out of their Toils, care was taken to secure all the Ports that none might fly beyond Sea.

Here is a sad Prospect before us; but in what Disposition are we to bear it? We have no reason to doubt but great numbers will turn with the Tide, as they did then. Many who seem now to be hot and zealous for the Protestant Religion, will then, perhaps, be as busie to discover and accuse those whom they now censure, not only rashly, but maliciously. Men of ill Lives, and defiled Consciences, want that Principle vvvhich must strengthen them to bear the Cross, and make it easie and comfortable to them. It is quite another thing to own this Faith in our present Circumstances, from what it will be to adhere to it then.

It is not yet come that, and God of his infinite Mercy preserve us from it. We are taught by him that knew our Nature well, *to watch and pray that we enter not into Temptation; for tho the Spirit, or our sublimer Powers may be forward and willing, yet the Flesh is weak.* We are therefore to do all that is in our Power, and is consistent vvith that Religion vvhich vve profess, to prevent this. You of this Honourable Assembly are now entrusted vvith the keeping this Doctrine, as it is a part of the Law of the Land; the People have trusted you with all that is dear to them; and it is hoped you will acquit your selves as worthy of so great a Confidence. On this I shall enlarge no further, but apply to you the Message ^{Esth. 4. 13.} which Mordecai sent to Queen Esther, when her People were marked out for destruction: *Think not that you shall escape more than all the rest: for if you altogether hold your peace at this time, there may come enlargement and deliverance to us from another hand; but you and your Houses shall be destroyed: and who knows if you are come into this trust for such a time as this is.* If any shall, either on the one hand, give up this Holy Religion, and those means which are most effectual to secure it, for private or base ends of their own; or, on the other hand, shall, to gratify their Revenge, or to advance any ill Design, endeavour to drive things to Confusion, so that we become a Prey to a formidable Neighbour, where Popery, with its concomitant Tyranny, shall subdue us at once: These are the Betrayers of their Religion and their Country, and do entitle themselves to the heaviest Curses in the whole Book of God.

But the Nation hopes better things from you: and, as we pray for it, so are we confident they shall not be ashamed or disappointed of their hope. Your maintaining the Laws, or providing such new ones

as our present Circumstances call for, for the preservation of our Religion, is not all that you are to do for it; there are many other Things besides that come under your care, which are also necessary, that we may *Hold fast* this our Profession. I shall name two Particulars. The one is, that there are so many Parishes in this Great and Rich Kingdom, in vvhich there is so little Provision left for those that labour in the Work of the Gospel, that it is not possible, humanely speaking, to find fit and able Pastors to undertake such a Charge upon so mean an Encouragement: and many of these fall to be the greatest and the most populous Parishes in their Neighbourhood: *The Labourer is worthy of his Hire*: But in many of these the Hire will not amount to the meanest and most frugal Subsistence, that can consist with the decency of that Function. If weak or scandalous Men are cast on such Places, so that the People are neither instructed nor edified by their Labours, but are rather scandalized by them: it is worth your serious Consideration, to find out effectual Means for redressing so great an Evil, by which so many Souls are lost, and such a Door has been opened to Seducers and false Teachers among us. The other is, that we will endeavour to secure the Reformed Religion among us, by doing all we can to maintain the Outworks of it, I mean, the Foreign Churches, some of whom are now in a most deplorable and sinking Condition. The Methods that *Julian* the Apostate used to extirpate Christianity, not by the quick and sharp Ways of Persecution, but by slower Steps; being now taken to root out that, which main Force could not do. To these we ought to extend our Compassion and Assistance, as we would expect the

the like from others when we may be brought to drink of the like bitter Cup, which how near it may be to us, God only knows. But all these Means will prove ineffectual if we have not God on our side; except he watch over us, and build up our Ruines, you that build, ^{Pfal. 127. 1.} and we that watch, shall labour in vain. This leads me to the fourth Particular, which is,

4. That the chief use we ought to make of this Doctrine, is to reform our Hearts and Lives, to repent of, and forsake our Sins. *Repent*: I shall not here run out into a large Discourse of this, but sum up in short what is comprehended under it. The word imports more than a bare sorrowing for our Sins, or an external change of our Life, and does chiefly signifie the inward Change and Reformation of our Minds: when we put on a new Disposition, come under new principles, and are inwardly turned in the value and estimate we have of things, and in our practical judgments and formed Resolutions. Repentance is, when a Man having another sense of God, and true Goodness, another apprehension of Vice and Sin, other thoughts of a future State, other Impressions of the Love of Christ, and the Truth of the Gospel; and all these things growing into formed Principles in him, his Mind is turned to such a detestation of his former course of Life, as engages him not only to forsake it, but to enter upon a quite different Course; so that he feels himself inwardly regenerated and changed. Oh, have I not been describing a thing little understood! Some sorrow for Sin, which is scarce possible for the worst Men to avoid, is all the Notion too many have of it: Others fancy to compound for their Sins, with some Austerities, by an outward pageantry, or compounding
with.

with God or his Saints if they can, and doing it effectually where they can, with the Priest: believing that his absolving them is of some other Virtue, than a Declaration to them of what they may certainly expect if they are sincere in their Repentance. But if these things come short of a true Repentance, what is to be said of those who have not so much? who have no remorse for their Sins, but live on securely in them, or do worse, *Glory in their Shame*. These are far enough from having repented, who are growing up daily to a higher pitch in their Impieties. You have expressed your sense of the Necessity of this Duty, by your addressing about it: but if it goes no further than the solemnity of a days vacation from Business, or abstaining from Meat, and the hearing some Sermons, or joining in Prayers; this can have no other effect but to raise our guilt higher, by our pretending to draw near to God with our Lips, when our Hearts are far from him. Our Sins are drawing heavy Judgments on us: our Repentance only can prevent them; not such a trifling Performance as I have described, but a sincere and entire turn to God. We ought to be humbling our selves in secret, every one for those Sins by which we have provoked him, and have been adding to that great Heap of Guilt, by which we have been too universally treasuring up Wrath against the Day of Wrath. We are apt enough to censure the Vices and Failings of others, especially if on other Accounts we are displeased with them, and if we our selves are not visibly faulty in the same kind. But there are other Sins, besides Uncleaness and Intemperance, which may involve us in the common Ruin that threatens us. And if we know our selves guilty, even of that which we censure in others, we by judging them do
condemn

condemn our selves. Let us collect our Thoughts, and ask our selves, What have we done? Have we been adding Sin to Sin, and perhaps Hypocrisy, or a counterfeit Zeal to all the rest? We are under the Eye of the All-seeing God, to whom all things lie naked and open, *Darkness before him shineth as the Day; the Darkness and the Light are both alike to him.* Let us not deceive our selves; God is neither to be mocked, nor bribed. It is only our sincere Repentance that can again restore us to his Favour; and if the Sins of the Nation are not grown to that height, that, as is said of the Sin of *Manasseh*, *God will not* 2 King. 24. 4 *pardon it; so that though Noah, Job, and Daniel,* Ezek. 14. 14. *were among us, they could only deliver their own Souls;* We may hope, that upon our Repentance, either that Cloud of Wrath, now over our Heads, may be broken and dissipated, or, at least, that our Peace and Tranquillity may be so lengthned out, that *the Evil shall not come in our Days.*

If we Repent truly, we will lay down our Animosities and Quarrellings about lesser Matters; and finding how guilty we are, all in the presence of God, we will be more gentle in the Judgments we make of others, and more severe in the Censures we pass upon our selves. We will change the course and frame of our Lives, not only in such Instances as are more scandalous, and so may be a prejudice to us in our other Designs, but will enter upon another Method and Way of Life, such as becomes Christians. If this is not done, all that we do beside, will not be effectual to preserve us. If God is still offended with us, he will not want Instruments

F

for

for our punishment, though we had not a Papist in *England*, nor an Enemy in all the World.

But on the other hand, If we sincerely turn to God, as we know in general he is gracious and merciful, slow to Anger, and full of Compassion; so we have, in particular, all the Assurances that either his Promises, or the Experience of former Times can give us, that *He will receive us graciously; that he will take away all our Iniquities, and heal all our Back-slidings.*

Personal Repentance, and the mourning for the Sins of others, are Duties incumbent on all: To these you stand obliged in your private Capacities; But as you make up this Honourable Assembly, there is a futher Repentance incumbent on you. You, who represent the Nation, ought, in the Name of the whole Body of the People, to think on such Laws as are necessary for the restraint of Vice. It is visible, the Impiety of the Nation has made way for Popery; and though that were out of doors, yet if the other continues still, it will prepare us to open Atheism and Irreligion. God cannot be at Peace with us, while our Adulteries are so many, while Drunkenness is so common, while Religion is so much scorned, even by those who seem zealous for it; while Cursing and Swearing are the usual Dialect; while Profanity, Scurrilous Talk, and many other things which ought not to be named among Christians, are so openly and bare-facedly practised among us. By your endeavours to redress these, and at least, to make People ashamed of them, if they

they do not forsake them ; You shall also, in your publick Capacity, shew the reality of your Repentance, both to God and the World. It is an ordinary thing for all People, who have some one great thing in their Eye, to look only at that, and to over-look many other Things, if they do not immediately belong to that of which they are chiefly afraid. Popery is now in your Eye, and it ought to be so, till you have to purpose secured us from the danger of it : But at the same time you ought to look further, to the Ground of God's displeasure against us, to that which has brought us into all this Danger, and must certainly bring ruin on us in conclusion, if effectual Remedies are not found out in time. Our Irreligion and Impiety has made many to be little concerned in these Matters ; and our Contentions about some inconsiderable Things, has diverted the Thoughts and Endeavours of others, to the securing of particular Interests, or making of Parties.

To these, if you provide effectual Remedies, both for reforming and uniting us, then you shall be had in perpetual remembrance, as the Repairers of our Breaches, and the Restorers of our Ruins : so that all shall bless you, and in their wishes for a happy Parliament, shall name you with Honour, and wish it may be such a one as this has been.

We have all the reason in the World to conclude, that this Nation is dear unto God ; and we are sure, the Holy Religion we profess, is from him ; why should we then despond, and not still hope in that God, who has hitherto given us such abundant Proofs

of his care of us, and of his regard to the Reformation among us. When we remember by what steps and methods it was brought in and established here ; How short the Storm was in Queen *Mary's* Reign, and that she died without Issue, which might have brought us both under Popery, and made us a Province to a Foreign Tyranny ; when we reflect on the long and glorious Reign of Queen *Elizabeth* ; on the happy disappointment of the *Armada*, believed and called *Invincible* ; the discovery of the *Gunpowder Plot*, with the later Blessings yet in our Eyes ; we have from all these much reason to conclude, that we are in a special manner favoured of God. Nothing can break off this course of Mercies with which he has followed us, but our obstinate persisting in our Sins : If we resolve on this, there is nothing before us, but a fearful prospect of Wrath and Indignation. And this leads me to the fifth and last Particular, of which I proposed to speak, which is,

5. That such as do not make this use of the Gospel, as to be thereby led to Repentance, have reason to look for sudden and severe Judgments. *If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a Thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.* God's Judgments are a great depth, and the Methods of them are unaccountable : Some wicked Nations, and Impious and Tyrannical Governments, have flourished long ; Triumph and Victory have seemed entailed on them. The *Assyrian* of old, and the Turkish Empire at present, are great Instances of this. These are Portions of the World, which

which God for their other Sins gave in prey to savage Masters; whose Prosperity made them the fitter Instruments of his Justice. But it is observable, that those Nations whom he has more especially favoured, are more signally punished when their Sins have been so notorious, that it seemed necessary to give publick Evidences of the impartiality of God's governing the World. *You only have I known of all the Families of the Earth; therefore will I punish you for your Iniquities.* *Amos 3. 2.* The whole History of the *Jews*, till their final and almost total Destruction, is one continued Instance of this. The Roman Empire, when it turned Christian, but was not much reformed by that Light, was given up to be wasted by swarms of *Goths, Vandals, Huns*, and other Northern Nations, who for near two Ages together, laid it so waste, that what by the Destruction they made, and the Famine that followed upon that, which brought after it unheard of Plagues, the History of that Time contains a Succession of the most terrible Miseries that can be imagined. The *African* Churches, that were the best regulated of any then in the World, yet having fallen from their first Love, and being rent in pieces by Schism, and becoming generally corrupt in their Manners, notwithstanding the excellent Bishops that were among them; *St. Austin* in particular, who was the last of those that were sent to warn them of the Judgments they might look for, which he did faithfully; but nothing prevailing, they were first destroyed by the *Vandals*, and then so totally by the *Saracens* and *Moors*, that the Name of Christ is called on no more in them, except it be in their Dungeons;

geons, by those miserable Captives that are kept in such slavery among them, that it should tear every Christian's Heart to think on it. The Eastern Empire was first by the *Goths*, then by the *Huns* and the *Avars*, afterwards by the *Saracens*, and finally by the *Turks*, so wasted, that the small Remains of Christianity among them, serve only as the Ruins of some great Fabrick, to shew what once it was. The City of *Antioch*, once among the noblest of the World, in which that glorious Name of Christian first began, was by a frequent return of most terrible Earth-quakes, and devouring Fires, so ruined, that it is now but a small inconsiderable Village. *Sardis*, in my Text, is no better: These Seven Churches here writ to, are now under the slavery of *Mahometans*, and indeed retain little but the Name of Christian; some of them are so entirely destroyed, that it is not so much as certain where they stood. When we hear of these things, we ought wisely to consider of these Works of the Lord: Why should we hope to escape, if we are as guilty as they were? But to turn your Eyes to what is nearer you; After the Gospel was planted here in *Britain*, while we were under the Roman Yoke, and was watered with the Blood of many Martyrs that suffered under the Heathenish Persecution; The *Britans* being blest with Peace and Prosperity, did soon forget God, and fell from their first Love. Then what Judgments fell on them? The Northern People being more Warlike, broke into the Southern Parts, who were soft and luxurious: These hiring the *Saxons* to their Assistance, were thereby brought under a much more
cruel

cruel Bondage ; and those either rooted out the Christian Religion, or drove it up into the Mountainous parts of this Kingdom. What the Sins, both of the Clergy and Laity were, is set out by *Gildas*, that lived not long after that Time ; and they resemble our present Condition so much, that it gives us cause to fear the Parallel shall be as equal in our Judgments, as it is now in our Sins. When the Reformation began first in *England*, many run into it, rather out of hatred to the Clergy, and love to their Lands, than out of Zeal for the Truth : So that the Bishops in King *Edward's* Time, did, by some Letters which they sent about among their Clergy, call upon them to warn the People of the heavy Judgments of God, ready to fall upon them : but they went on in their Sins with a high hand, so that the Land was full of Oppression and Injustice, Adultery and Sensuality : God visited them for these things, and took away that blessed young King, and left them in the hands of a superstitious and bloody Princess, who fearing her own Power was not strong enough to alter the established Religion, married the Prince of *Spain*, and by a vast Treasure which he brought over into *England*, corrupted the great Men, and the Publick Councils of the Kingdom ; so that all that had been building up in twenty five years, was overthrown in a little more than one, by Parliaments, over whom Spanish Gold had greater influence, than the Sense of their Trust, or their Regard to God and their Country. Shall I put you in mind of the terrible Judgment of God, that broke out lately on our neighbouring Island, where, the Barbarity of the Natives
being.

being sharpened by the Cruelty of their Religion, and the Practices of their Priests, a Massacre and Destruction did almost wholly consume them? How near were we brought to utter Ruin? and how long were we ruled by the Sword, during the late Wars?

Are all these things forgotten? Or, do we remember them, only to furnish out Discourse with them? We at present are all sufficiently apprehensive of our ill Condition, we see the great Danger we are in of Popery's subduing us; we see an overgrown Neighbour ready to break in upon us, or at least, upon that which is but a step from us. There is a Fermentation among our selves, so high, that it is like to involve us in great Confusions: The things that belong to our Peace seem to be hid from our eyes. Is not all this of the Lord? Most of the Evils we either feel or apprehend, are the natural Effects of our Sins and Vices, as well as of the Judgment of God punishing us for them. The Vices too common amongst us, have corrupted the Minds, and darkned the Understandings of many, and are like to become their own Punishments.

All these things are but the beginnings of Sorrows, which seem to be coming on us. What do we then? Do we sit crossing our hands, accusing one another, or it may be, faintly condemning our selves? We perhaps imagine, if we were rid of Popery, all would be well. It is certain, we should be much better than we are: but if the Root of our Distemper remains, the carrying off one Sympton will but dispose the way to another. God can either plague us,
by

by delivering us up to a forreign Enemy, who shall have no pity on us; or can again send his Arrows among us, a Pestilence to sweep away our Inhabitants, or a Fire to burn down our Cities. He can leave us to bite and devour one another, till we are consumed one of another. And if he come upon us, what can we do to withstand his mighty Arm? Can we restrain his Thunders, or be proof against his Arrows? O how weak are all Devices, when God blasts them! If our Distractions continue, we are like the Builders of *Babel*, so divided, that nothing but utter and irremediable Confusion is like to be the end of them, if we once fall in pieces.

Well, we are yet in Peace, we rise up and lie down in quiet; how long it will be so, we cannot tell: We seem to be near great Convulsions; we have no reason to desire them. We are now full of Wealth, our Trade is free, and much spread; we have a Concurrence, both at home and abroad, of many things that might yet make us a great and happy People, but want the Power to improve it. What shall the end of these things be? It were too great a presumption in me, nor proper for this place or occasion, to enter into Particulars; but one thing I may adventure on, which is, If you of this Honourable Assembly, who have now bespoke the Prayers of the whole Nation upon your Consultations, would frequently address your selves to God, and set off such Hours as your Business can admit of, for earnest Prayer to God, to direct and bless your Councils, and to bend all your Hearts, to that which is both most for his Glory, the Establishment of his true Religion,

G.

ligion, and the Security, Peace, and Happiness of the Kingdom ; we might justly hope, *that God, even our God, would give his Blessing to Endeavours so begun, and so managed : Then should the Light of the Gospel, which is our Glory, still dwell in our Land : Mercy and Truth should meet together, and Righteousness and Peace should kiss one another : Then should the Lord give us that which is good, and our Land should yield her increase. O that there were such an Heart in us, that we might fear him, and keep his Commandments always ; that so it may be well with us, and our Children after us, for ever.*

To God the Father, Son, and Holy-Ghost, .be all Honour and Glory, both now and evermore.

FINIS.